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WILDLIFE SERVICES—IDAHO

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USDA Helps Resolve Wildlife Conflicts in Idaho

Every day, Idaho's residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Idaho WS helps reduce a diverse array of conflicts between people and wildlife. WS protects livestock, particularly sheep and calves, from predation by coyotes, black bears, mountain lions, and other predators. In addition, WS cooperates with State and Federal natural resource agencies in conducting studies to assess the potential impacts of predation on wildlife. WS' trained wildlife biologists and technicians assist farmers, ranchers, and other property owners with management of damage caused by yellow-bellied marmots, beavers, and other rodents, and help dairy and feedlot owners reduce damage from large flocks of starlings and blackbirds. WS is also actively involved in managing problems caused by threatened or endangered species like the gray wolf and grizzly bear. The program provides technical assistance to airports that have concerns about wildlife collisions with airplanes and works with aquaculture producers who



request help to reduce predation by fish eating birds. WS experts also provide technical assistance to grain farmers to reduce damage caused by waterfowl and sandhill cranes.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Livestock from Predators—Predation is the single largest cause of death to sheep in Idaho, typically accounting for about one third of the total annual losses suffered by Idaho sheep producers. Much of the livestock grazing in Idaho occurs on Federal and State range lands where livestock are often vulnerable to predation. In 2001, predators killed a reported 12,000 sheep and lambs in Idaho. Coyotes were responsible for more than 70 percent of the damage, while domestic dogs, black bears, mountain lions, wolves, red foxes, and eagles accounted for most of the other predator losses. Data collected by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) suggests that predation losses in Idaho during the five-year period from 1997 to 2001 averaged about 4.4 percent for lambs and 1.3 percent for adult sheep. These are the average predation loss rates sustained with a control program in place. Research indicates that in the absence of a control program, predator losses

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Idaho:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing blackbird and starling damage to feedlots
- Developing new and improving existing coyote damage management methods
- Exploring and documenting the efficacy of nonlethal methods to prevent wolf predation on livestock
- Improving rodent damage management methods

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting sheep, cattle, other livestock, and poultry from predation
- Protecting crops, livestock feedlots, and dairies from damage caused by rodents and migratory birds
- Reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Protecting timber, roads, and irrigation structures from beaver damage
- Preventing predation of federally-listed threatened and endangered species as well as other species of special concern

would average about 17 percent for lambs and 4.5 percent for adult sheep. A conservative economic analysis of predator control efforts to protect sheep in southern Idaho has shown a 3:1 benefit-cost ratio.

Threatened and Endangered Species Activities—WS plays a crucial role in managing the expanding population of gray wolves in Idaho. Since wolves were initially reintroduced to Central Idaho in 1995, wolf populations have continued to grow and expand their range, and wolf predation on livestock has likewise increased. By providing prompt and effective responses to complaints of wolf predation, WS helps reduce livestock losses to wolves and helps promote greater tolerance of wolves by affected local communities and ranchers. WS also cooperates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nez Perce Tribe in live-capturing and radio-collaring wolves to facilitate the monitoring of Idaho's expanding wolf population.

WS is cooperating with researchers from the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), the program's research arm, to field test the Radio Activated Guard (RAG), a nonlethal scare device, used in and around cattle calving pastures. When a radio-collared wolf approaches a calving pasture being protected by the RAG, the telemetry signal emitted from the wolf's radio collar activates the RAG, which then triggers flashing lights and loud noises that frighten the wolf or wolves away from the area. WS has also cooperated with the Nez Perce Tribe and the University of Idaho in carrying out a study on the impacts of wolf predation to cattle on summer grazing allotments in Lemhi County. Results of this cooperative study suggest that for every calf killed by wolves and found by the cattle producer, as many as 5.7 additional wolf kills may have occurred without ever being detected.

Grizzly bears are another species requiring special attention. Grizzly bears are listed as a threatened species in Idaho, and WS responds to complaints of grizzly bear predation on livestock in the eastern part of the State, particularly along the border near Yellowstone National Park. Depredating grizzly bears are usually relocated in cooperation with the Idaho or Wyoming Departments of Fish and Game.

Protecting Natural Resources—WS cooperates with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to protect various wildlife species. These efforts have included assessing the benefits of coyote removal for the protection of mule deer and assessing the potential benefits



to sage grouse following the removal of nest and chick predators, such as ravens, coyotes, badgers, and red foxes. An initial study on the effects of predator removal on artificial sage grouse nests showed that in an area where no predators were removed, 98 percent of artificial nests were destroyed by predators in one week. But only 28 percent of the artificial nests were destroyed in an area where predator removal had occurred for one month. WS has also conducted predator control to protect nesting waterfowl, pheasants, and the threatened northern Idaho ground squirrel.

Looking to the Future

Several years ago, WS was invited to participate with other agencies and affected interests in forming a Sandhill Crane Working Group to address some of the crop damage problems caused by these birds. Efforts to implement an effective lure crop program, in conjunction with an intensive hazing program, have been limited due to a lack of resources.

Populations of predators, such as ravens and red foxes, which prey on sage grouse nests and chicks, have increased dramatically over historic population levels. During this same period of time, sage grouse populations have experienced significant long-term declines. WS could play a significant role in helping to determine whether predation may be contributing to declining sage grouse populations in southern Idaho.

Idaho Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

